

**TESTIMONY OF FAVOR, INC. FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE H.B. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING  
THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30,2017 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS  
THEREFOR DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**February 16, 2017**

Good evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide feedback to you on the Governor's proposed budget adjustments for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Social Services.

My name is Josephine Hawke. I am the Executive Director of FAVOR, Inc. -- the Connecticut State Organization for the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Each year, FAVOR provides direct peer support services and parent/caregiver training that touch over 5,000 families across the state who have children with behavioral and mental health challenges. We advocate and empower families to lead the transformation of the children's mental health system --whether it is as parents sitting a provider discussing the needs of their own child or working in the community to ensure that all children have access to the services that they need in their communities.

The families who we serve encounter significant gaps in children's services, uneven access to mental health and specialty services for children, shortages of child psychiatrists, and disparities in health insurance coverage for families based on socioeconomic status and system involvement. Unfortunately, state investment in programs and services that directly affect children has fallen to a record low after last year's "cuts-only" approach to budget deficits (Thomas, 2017).

We are pleased to see that the Governor's proposed budget continues funding for important line items, we remain concerned about how some of the proposed reductions will impact our families.

The funding for DCF to (1) achieve the performance benchmarks under the Juan F. decree; (2) restore of the budget cuts made to DCF last year; (3) expand evidence-based programs e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS); and (4) continue to give primary care physicians access to psychiatric consultation through ACCESS Mental Health will provide needed quality services for our children.

However, we respectfully ask the Committee to restore funding for:

- **Short-term Assessment and Respite (STAR) homes for children with severe emotional disturbances who at risk of being removed from their homes.** STAR homes are an integral part of the service delivery system that provides safe therapeutic environments in a home-like setting for children who require constant and reprieve for parents who are at risk of caregiver burnout.
- **Juvenile justice services.** The proposed cuts to juvenile justice services jeopardizes the ability of DCF to effectively serve youths being diverted from Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). Current levels of services are not sufficient to effectively serve youths already being diverted. In October, DCF outlined a plan for the expansion of substance use, vocational readiness, and wraparound services in neighborhoods where youths reside. The proposal to raise the age of youths in the juvenile justice system to 18 years of age would compound the problem.

- **Community Kidcare Prevention.** This funding helps educate parents and caregivers about navigating the service delivery systems and ensures that their experiences inform the policy making process for children's mental health.
- **FY2017 holdbacks** which resulted in program closures, staff layoffs, and service disruptions across state departments. We ask that these holdbacks not be annualized. These holdbacks threaten the quality and availability of services that our children need.

In addition, we want to express our deep concerns about the proposed changes to HUSKY A that will result in 9,500 parents losing Medicaid (Senserrich, 2017). This combined with other changes in Medicaid eligibility will put an undue burden on the vulnerable low income families and persons with disabilities.

We urge you to consider other options such as tax reforms and privatizing mental health services (Levin Becker, 2017).

I want to thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of our families. You have a challenging job ahead of you.

Sincerely,

Josephine M. Hawke, PhD  
Executive Director  
FAVOR, Inc.  
Office Phone: (860) 563-3232 x201  
Cell Phone: (860) 462-9842  
Fax: (860) 563-3961  
Email: [jhawke@favor-ct.org](mailto:jhawke@favor-ct.org)

## REFERENCES

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Senserrich, R. (February, 2017). Voices from the Capitol (VI): Budget, minimum wage and Appropriations. Connecticut Voices for Children. (<http://www.ctvoices.org/blog> ).

Thomas, D. (January, 2017). "Connecticut's Declining Children's Budget: Total spending devoted to children lowest on record," Connecticut Voices for Children, (<http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/connecticuts-declining-childrens-budget> ).